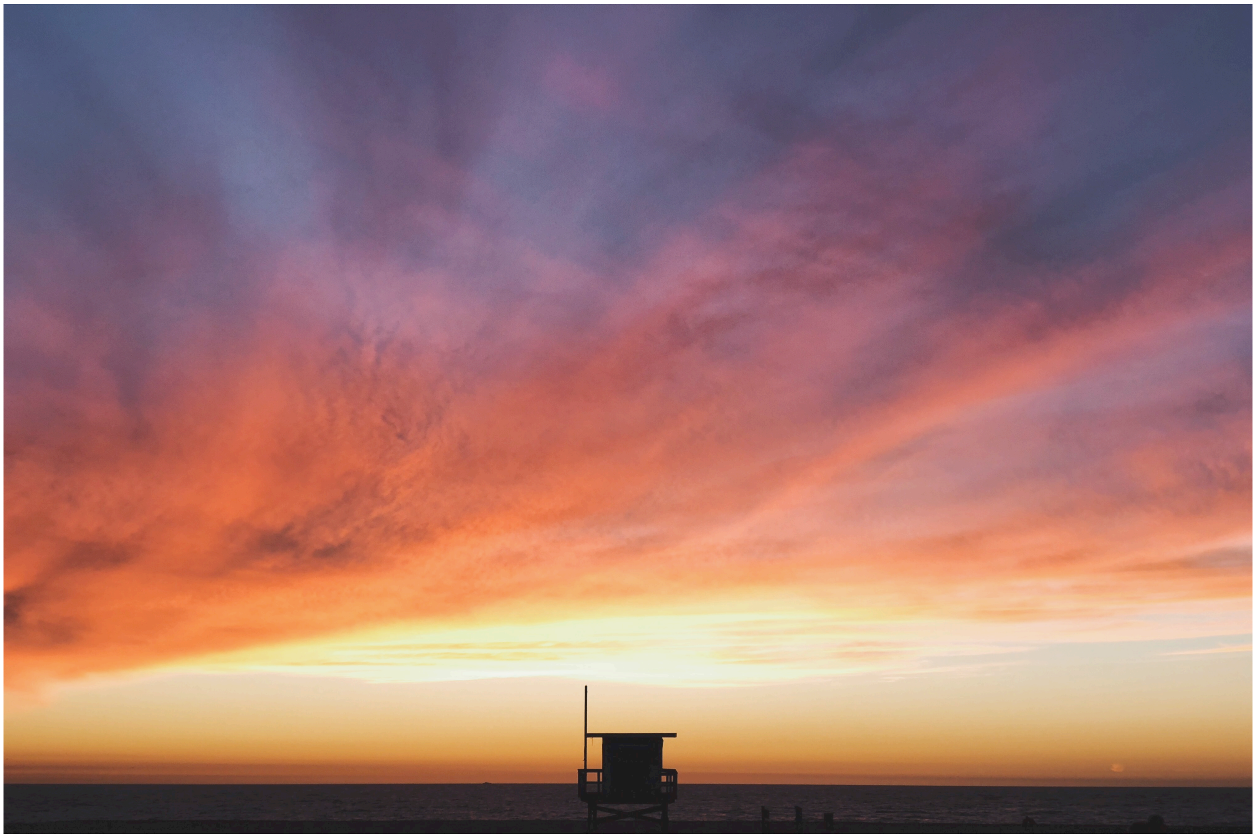
In the age of Instagram and social media, it seems like the ‘sunset’ photo is one of the most popular and commonly shared photos out there. The amount of photos of sunsets we see is astounding and yet, every now and then there is that one sunset photo that catches you by surprise. Why don’t all the other ones look like that? There are many reasons and we wanted to walk you through a few tricks on how to take truly stunning sunset photos. Also, just to note, while using the light from the sunset is always a great tool for a photographer, we are going to focus on actually photographing the setting sun in this article.

Now one of the more obvious things to consider when taking a sunset shot is location. You should find unique locations that will at least fill part of your frame. Also, you have to make sure that where you are taking the photo from is facing where the sun is going to be setting. Ideally, you find somewhere that will add to the sunset, maybe with silhouetted foreground elements or by having scenery that is also being illuminated by the setting sun. Now, once you are at that location, how do you make sure that you capture its beauty.

First and foremost, play with your exposure settings, don't shoot auto! Play with white balance, shady or cloudy settings will give make it nice and golden, AWB will turn it white and not golden which might be a look you like but typically, you will want to have that nice golden look. From there, if you are shooting the actual setting sun, it's probably far off in the distance. Because of this, if you have any foreground elements, you will probably want to stop down your f-stop so more is in focus and you don't have incredibly blurry silhouettes in your frame. When pointing at the sun, you should have plenty of light so don't be afraid to bring down that ISO and make the shutter speed faster. One tip too is to have your ISO around 800 and a faster shutter so once the sun sets, if you want to keep taking photos as it gets darker, you just need to adjust your shutter speed.



Silhouettes are always a great thing to place in your frame and can really add to the beauty of the setting sun. While looking out over a vast landscape or ocean is always beautiful, placing a subject in the frame or moving to have something between you and the setting sun can tell more of a story and help make your photo more interesting. Another thing to consider is how you compose your sunset. If there are a lot of clouds in the sky, typically they will add great texture and colors to your photo, so placing the horizon lower in frame is a good idea to show off the epicness of the colors. Other times, if you are on a cliff or using a drone, placing the horizon higher in the frame reveals everything the setting sunlight is hitting.

Now if you are having issues getting everything in your frame to expose correctly, you can bracket expose or use HDR. Bracketing essentially means taking multiple exposures and placing them on top of each other in a software like Adobe Photoshop. One shot should be exposed for the shadows in the frame and the other shot exposed for the highlights in your frame. Then, when you layer them, you get the most from the highlights and shadows of each image. This does require a tripod so the photos have the exact same framing and a bit of post-editing knowledge to blend the images together and make it look natural. While this can lead to some truly stunning images, don't feel like you wont get great images by not doing this. Most of these photos were taken straight out of camera.

At the end of the day, it really comes down to not just taking a photo of the setting sun but instead, the surroundings and using that beautiful golden hour lighting as part of your image. It is also a great excuse to spend the end of your day outside, watching the sun go down but don’t forget to put more than just the setting sun in your frame. Use your surroundings and everything that that beautiful golden hour lighting is touching. Also, remember that by the time you are ready to go, it’ll be getting dark and probably a bit cooler so be prepared and bring a flashlight if you have a long walk back to your car or house.